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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [NS](#)

SUBJECT: SURINAME: JOCKEYING BEGINS, BUT EARLY ELECTIONS
STILL UNLIKELY

REF: A. PARAMARIBO 789

[1](#)B. PARAMARIBO 336

[1](#)C. PARAMARIBO 750

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Though parliamentary elections in Suriname are not scheduled until 2010, recent political posturing and rumors of shifting alliances have led some media and politicians to speculate that early elections might occur as early as 2007. The weak, eight-party coalition headed by President Venetiaan enjoys little support among the public - and questionable support among coalition members. Thus, rumors of shifting political alliances here often contain an iota of plausibility and the potential to destabilize fragile political accords. While there is a precedent for early elections, there is no constitutional mechanism, and despite the jockeying for position, early elections seem unlikely.
END SUMMARY

Bouterse and Somohardjo alliance?

[1](#)2. (U) Prominent opposition figure (and former military dictator) Desi Bouterse,s public praise of Speaker of Parliament Paul Somohardjo (Pertjaja Luhur, PL) in a December 9 speech to his National Democratic Party (ref a) reignited media speculation of a possible alliance between the two, which would lead Somohardjo,s party (PL) to break with the current government coalition. Newspapers subsequently reported that Somohardjo and Bouterse met the week of December 8, further fueling the rumor mill. Neither Bouterse nor Somohardjo would confirm that a meeting took place, but Somohardjo again repeated earlier comments that amnesty should be considered for Bouterse, who is scheduled to go on trial in early 2007 for the murder of fifteen political opponents in 1982. Somohardjo himself is tainted by a conviction for sexual harassment and widespread rumors of corruption.

Vice President,s Party in turmoil again

[1](#)3. (U) The Hindustani-based United Reform Party (VHP) has been in turmoil since the death of longtime party leader Jagernath Lachmon in 2001. The VHP continues to fray due to contentious elections in the summer of 2006 (ref b) and public infighting. After a series of newspaper articles claimed that elements within the party were calling for new parliamentary elections in 2007, the VHP leadership issued a press release expressing support for the coalition and its coalition partners, and emphatically denying any calls from within the party for early elections. Meanwhile, the

internal opposition within the VHP (Union for Renewal, Rejuvenation, and Change, VVV) met in Nieuw Nickerie, Suriname,s second largest city and VHP stronghold, and complained that party leadership has no effective national voice and does little to support its constituent base.

Partnerships, posturing, and positioning

¶4. (SBU) Various party leaders are already discussing options for 2010. Outspoken opposition parliamentarian Jiwan Sital (Alternative-1) publicly spoke of forming an election coalition with other opposition parties, but also said he is open to the idea of working with parties from the current coalition should it break apart. Former President Jules Wijdenbosch (Democratic National Platform 2000, DNP-2000) said he would like to serve another term as President. Newspapers and magazines began to editorialize about a possible candidacy for charismatic, energetic Minister of Justice and Police Chandrikapersad Santokhi (VHP). A new socialist party called &Forum for Socialism and Democracy8 was formed (ref c), and a prominent former VHP member discussed in the newspapers the possibility of forming a regional party in Nieuw Nickerie. In private conversation with EmbOff, this same ex-VHP member also opined that Venetiaan would welcome early elections as a chance to escape from his more difficult coalition partners, Somohardjo and Ronnie Brunswijk (leader of the maroon-based A-Combination and chief protagonist of the Interior War of the early 1990,s). For his part, at a public meeting Somohardjo said he isn,t worried about persistent rumors that other coalition parties would like to see PL replaced by DNP-2000.

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Precedent * but no formal mechanism * for early elections

¶5. (U) There is a precedent for early elections: in 2000, then-President Wijdenbosch resigned in the face of massive street demonstrations. However, the constitution does not provide guidelines for loss of confidence motions, minority coalitions, early elections, or any circumstances outside of regularly scheduled elections, and the 2000 capitulation was an ad hoc solution to widespread discontent, an ingredient absent from the current political mix.

¶6. (SBU) COMMENT: It is unlikely that the current coalition members will willingly give up power and the spoils it brings in exchange for a risky plunge into the muddy waters of early elections; however, as always, they seem to be keeping their options open. Somohardjo,s political theatrics are more likely intended to gain leverage within the government coalition. Bouterse,s infrequent tirades usually result in a few weeks buzzing with speculation and political intrigue, but his recent outbursts may have a darker motive: diverting attention once again from his upcoming trial. Despite Venetiaan,s unfavorable ratings in public opinion polls, there is no popular alternative, and it is unlikely the President would risk an early loss at the ballot box or relish the challenge of building a new coalition.

¶7. (SBU) COMMENT CONTINUED: The inability and unwillingness of Suriname,s largely ethnically-based political parties to compromise or reach consensus) both internally and externally) has increased fragmentation across the political spectrum. Thus, despite widespread public discontent with the Venetiaan government, there is currently no political wrench with which the opposition can loosen coalition members, grip on each other, and on power.
END COMMENT
SCHREIBER HUGHES